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First the Blade

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FIRST THE BLADE

By David Sedlacek

First the Blade is a ministry to seminary families that was initiated by seminary faculty who saw the struggles of many seminary student families to support their children's education in the Adventist school system. Its initial vision was to provide limited funding for Adventist education for these children. As the ministry has evolved, its mission and vision have expanded to include other forms of support for seminary student families that includes resourcing, counseling, parents' night out, and other new ventures such as a children's author program.

Staffing for First the Blade includes a faculty coordinator currently from the Department of Discipleship & Religious Education, seminary students who choose First the Blade as their Theological Field Education internship experience, and social work students who do either their first- or second-year field placement with First the Blade under the supervision of the faculty coordinator. Students can also do their MA (religious education) family ministry practicum with First the Blade.

Scholarship Funds for Adventist Christian Education

Each month, an offering is collected at one seminary worship service in order to provide funds for scholarships for the Adventist education of the children of seminary students who cannot fund this education by themselves. Donations also come from other faculty, staff and community sources. Students apply for these funds on an application form provided by the ministry. While the seminary family is committed to supporting the children of the men and women who study here, our experience over the past few years has shown that what we can provide alone falls far short of meeting the complete needs of student families. Depending

upon the amount that comes in during both the fall and spring semesters, we have been able to give amounts ranging from \$125–\$350 per child per semester. There are still many seminary student families who cannot afford to send their children to Adventist schools due to a lack of funds on their part as well as our inability to help enough. We believe that our vision has been too small. We serve a big God who is well able to make it possible for any seminary student family to send their children to an Adventist school, be it elementary, academy or university. Our new vision is in harmony with God's more-than-abundant provision. Therefore, our goal is to fund an endowment program that would be sufficient to provide funds for every seminary family to enroll their children in Adventist education. If you feel impressed to assist in meeting this goal, please prayerfully make a generous tax-deductible contribution through the Andrews University Giving website: vault.andrews.edu/vault/app/pages/advancement/login/development. Locate the "I Want to Invest In" link and scroll to the First the Blade Scholarship Fund. Thank you in advance for your help. Contributions to First the Blade are tax deductible.

Other First the Blade Services

The creative energy of seminary and social work students is greatly appreciated as they design programs that are helpful to seminary student families. We survey families to discover some of their real needs and below are some of the services we have found that resonate with them.

(1) Parents' Night Out: Students are very busy with classes, reading, papers and other projects. Most of them also must work to provide for their family's needs. Often they are too busy to spend enough time nurturing their relationship with one another. Therefore, First the Blade plans



FIRST THE BLADE

Helping Seminary Families
Disciple Their Children

nights where we provide organized childcare experiences while parents enjoy time with one another. These have been greatly appreciated breaks for parents.

(2) Family Visitation: Social work students often take the lead in visiting seminary families to provide counseling, support and prayer. Often they find that student families are unaware of resources in the community to help with food, clothing, furniture, homeschool connections and also much-needed social services. Sometimes children have special needs that can be helped by First the Blade staff. First the Blade, in cooperation with Andrews University, has produced a list of community resources that we give to families.

(3) Family Connections: Events are planned to help seminary student families connect with other families. By carefully listening to students, we have discovered that many families coming from other parts of the world experience loneliness and disconnection. Due to visa constraints, spouses of seminary students are unable to become employed. If they have children, they are home all day alone with them while the seminary student is busy with studies. This gives the spouse little opportunity to make connections that would make life here more enriching. Therefore, First the Blade is supporting a new initiative to orient not only seminary students but also their spouses at the beginning of the semester. We also try to connect families with other families who can watch each other's children in a cooperative childcare venture. At many of the events planned by First the Blade, a spiritual educational element is included for the parents. Often the topic relates to the family.

(4) Random Acts of Kindness: A new project being initiated by the First the Blade team involves recognizing that everyone needs to be treated kindly. When a person does a good deed, it feels good to be recognized even though that is not the motivation for being loving. However, when a person

is recognized randomly, just because they are, something special happens in the heart that draws that person closer to God. That is the purpose of this initiative.

(5) Children's Book: The newest venture for First the Blade is the production of a children's book called "Jesus Really Loves Me Because..." This book will be written by the children of seminary students and their parents. It will be an actual publication and each child will be recognized as a real author. They will be able to sell their books. Some of the proceeds will come to First the Blade. This is a very exciting new venture brought to us by seminary student Latoya Wright.

Students who are interested in being a part of this cutting-edge ministry or who want to do their TFE with us should contact David Sedlacek at sedlacek@andrews.edu. Please also contact him to apply for scholarship funds for seminary student children. To learn more about First the Blade, visit our webpage at: andrews.edu/sem/firsttheblade.



David Sedlacek is professor of family ministry and discipleship at our Seminary. He received his master's and doctorate in social work from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He has worked in both public and private settings as a clinician, researcher, teacher, pastor and administrator. He has worked extensively in the areas of addiction, abuse, relationships, marriage and family. He is a certified family life educator and a licensed clinical social worker and currently directs the MA in Youth & Young Adult Ministries program in the Seminary.